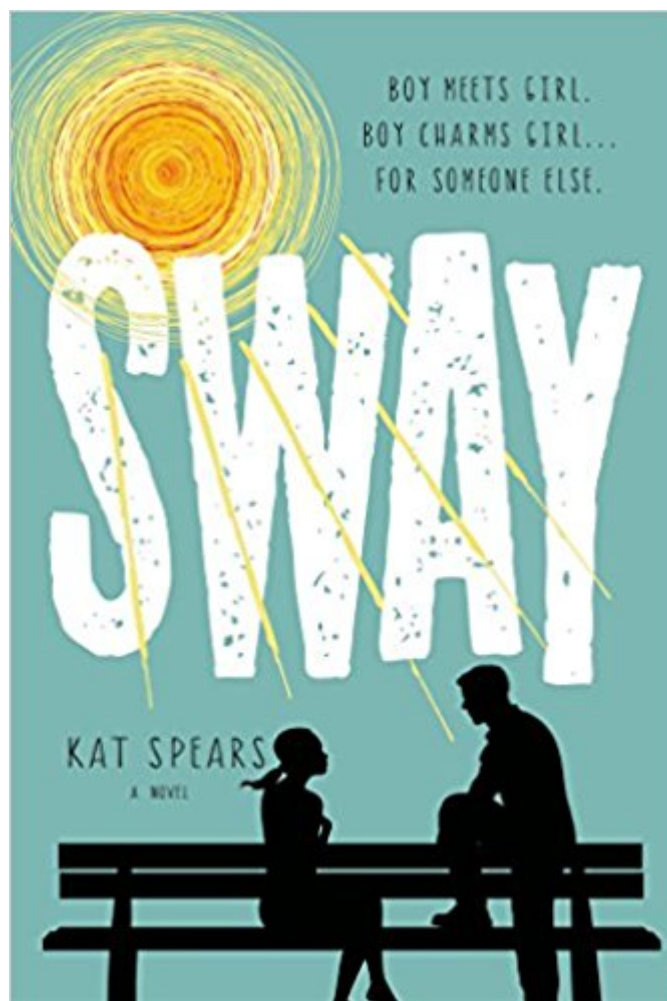


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# Sway: A Novel



## Synopsis

A YALSA 2015 Best Fiction for Young Adults Pick In Kat Spears's hilarious and often poignant debut, high school senior Jesse Alderman, or "Sway," as he's known, could sell hell to a bishop. He also specializes in getting things people want---term papers, a date with the prom queen, fake IDs. He has few close friends and he never EVER lets emotions get in the way. For Jesse, life is simply a series of business transactions. But when Ken Foster, captain of the football team, leading candidate for homecoming king, and all-around jerk, hires Jesse to help him win the heart of the angelic Bridget Smalley, Jesse finds himself feeling all sorts of things. While following Bridget and learning the intimate details of her life, he falls helplessly in love for the very first time. He also finds himself in an accidental friendship with Bridget's belligerent and self-pitying younger brother who has cerebral palsy. Suddenly, Jesse is visiting old folks at a nursing home in order to run into Bridget, and offering his time to help the less fortunate, all the while developing a bond with this young man who idolizes him. Could the tin man really have a heart after all? A Cyrano de Bergerac story with a modern twist, Sway is told from Jesse's point of view with unapologetic truth and biting humor, his observations about the world around him untempered by empathy or compassion---until Bridget's presence in his life forces him to confront his quiet devastation over a life-changing event a year earlier and maybe, just maybe, feel something again.

## Book Information

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[Romance > Contemporary](#)

## Customer Reviews

Gr 9 Up [Up](#) - Jesse Alderman, aka Sway, can get you what you want, no matter what. Drugs,

popularity, money, anything, but it comes at a cost. After his mom chased some prescription drugs with vodka and ended up dead on the bathroom floor, Jesse doesn't care about much, as long as he gets paid and people live up to their end of the bargain. But that all ends when school bully Ken Foster asks him to convince Bridget Smalley, an all-around wonderful person, to go out with Ken on a date. Jesse thinks this is just another business transaction until he meets Bridget and finds himself falling in love with her. Now, he's opening up to all kinds of people, including Bridget's younger brother, Pete, who feels alone and damaged because of his cerebral palsy, and Mr. Dunkelman, a man who lives at the nursing home where her grandmother lives. However, the more he feels for Bridget, the more he attempts to pull away from her and anyone who might care about him. And, now that the protagonist has made Ken appear like a nice guy in Bridget's eyes, she starts to pull away from Jesse, as well. From the first page, readers won't ever want to leave Jesse behind. At first glance, this novel seems like a typical *Cyrano de Bergerac*-type story, but it is much deeper than that, touching on topics such as parent abandonment, disabilities, bullying, and love. The main character's transformation and personality are well developed and believable, and readers will root for him along the way, even though he makes it difficult. References to drugs, alcohol, and suicide make it better suited for older teens. A engaging story that will stay with readers long past the final page.

•Traci Glass, Eugene Public Library, OR --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

“Sharp dialogue, edgy humor, and an unlikely hero make this page-turner a winner.”  
Publishers Weekly (starred review)  
“A compelling debut told with swagger and real depth.”  
Kirkus (starred review)  
“Spears’ debut novel sets an update on *Cyrano de Bergerac* in a contemporary high school, with noir undertones | Raw, honest | A gritty take on the male high school experience.”  
Booklist  
“Kat Spears debut novel is, quite simply, a delight. It has all the ingredients for an engaging and witty read, laced with honesty and insight that’s refreshingly real...the story is gritty and real, unafraid to cross over into the darker sides of teenage life, and unapologetic in its witty and honest portrayal. If anything, Kat Spears may just be the one with some very valuable sway; get ready to be sold.”  
Children’s Book Review  
“A page turner about high school’s victims and villains -- and about layers of callousness that spring from true grief.”  
Meg Medina, Pura Belpre award-winning author of *Yaqui Delgado Wants to Kick Your Ass*  
 “[The] characters are fantastic and real, but that plot? The licks and riffs that led to Jesse’s transformation totally blew me away, every damn page.”  
Gigi Amateau,

author of *Come August, Come Freedom: The Bellows, The Gallows, and The Black General Gabriel*

I almost became a Young Adult (YA) Librarian, so an interest in Young Adult Lit runs deeply for me. I remember as a teenager I felt so much of the literature for my age group was moralistic and didactic...nothing I wanted in a book where I sought escape. I just finished reading *Sway*, and how I wish this novel had been there for me back then! This is a novel into which you don't merely dip a toe but rather are swept from the first words into the deep current of the plot. Whereas the characters in J.K. Rowling's series have power in the form of being able to perform magic, *Sway's* main character, Jesse, has power derived from knowing how to manipulate the people around him as a chess Grand Master moves pieces on a board. Jesse makes it his business to know how those around him "tick" --and in turn how to get them to "tock" at will. As a result, he has students as well as adults paying his prices to fix problems they can't solve but know Jesse can--by reaching out to his ever-expanding web of information and favors owed. But being able to pull the strings to make things happen by no means makes Jesse's life perfect. Jesse understands himself less than he thinks he does and has built emotional barricades to prevent himself ever from being involved enough with other people to be hurt. In *Sway*, Jesse casts his brand of magic to set events into motion, and as they unfold, Jesse finds true friends who make it impossible for him to hide any longer from his emotions. And, cue the violins, Jesse finds love in a complex situation of his own making that ultimately comes down around him like a house of cards. He will never be the same and neither will you. Read *Sway* now.

Not for younger teens because of language, sexual situations, and drug use. The Prologue almost forced me to put it down. Advice to Kat Spears: dump the Prologue. The book is so good, the story so riveting, the prologue isn't needed. This is the story of a few months in the life of a teenage boy whose emotions are almost completely locked down due to a mentally ill mother who committed suicide and a mostly absent father. He gets things others want, for a price. He's a clever wheeler-dealer with a true talent for manipulating people and situations until he falls in love with a girl another student wants to date. She manages to thaw him out, bringing out qualities he didn't know he had. Hard to believe this is Spears' debut novel. It's written in such a way that I was certain it was written by a man! Looking forward to reading her next novel.

I kind of have a crush on this book. *Sway* is wildly inappropriate and it has a lot of drugs and shocking blasphemous teen talk about things that are hard to talk about, but I just saw that as honest.

There is some real heart to this book, and that didn't make the way the kids talked excusable, but it did make it feel real. The wit is biting, the protagonist is charming, and I laughed aloud enough that my completely uninterested-in-books husband finally asked me what I was reading. I think what I like about this book is that it really gave me a new perspective of a character type that I thought I had pegged. The drug dealer with a heart of gold is a strange archetype for me to fall for, but Sway absolutely did this to me. His worldview is completely different than what I would have imagined. The only other book where I really found a male narrator this interesting was in Tim Tharp's *The Spectacular Now* (the book, not the movie). Now, many readers will probably be offended by every other page. If you don't like irreverent books, leave this one alone, but if you have always kind of had your eye on that slick guy who seemed confident and cool without any effort at all, this is your book. Language and drug situations are really inappropriate for high school readers, but I think my high school readers of both genders could find this book engaging and compelling. I certainly did.

I agree with another reviewer that this is a gritty and real story. It has a lot of profanity and vulgarity. There is some drug use, talk about sex (nothing graphic) and many other teenage drama in the story. I was drawn to the cover one day when deciding what to read and I'm glad I decided on this. I enjoyed reading this story and I liked the ending. I recommend it for older readers.

I read this book because my son chose it to read for our family book club. I feel that he chose an interesting and witty book. At first, I didn't think I would like reading this book. But surprisingly, I really like this book a lot. It was witty, interesting and teaches you a lesson about life. My son chose well! I would recommend this book to anyone, young or old, who just wants to read a well thought out story that gives you a great feeling at the end of it. Great read!!!

Not sure why but this book just didn't work for me it was hard for me to become engaged with the story I disliked the characters. I loved the concept of the story the idea of it but not the writing style, characters or pace. It was a struggle to finish but I had hoped this book would be more than it was. I don't recommend it.

This book is incredible. Jesse (aka "Sway") is like Red in *The Shawshank Redemption*--if you need something, anything, he can get it. But unlike Red, Jesse is one seriously terrible guy--a masterful, tragic mess. And yet, you just can't stop turning the pages to find out what stunt he's going to pull next. You know that Jesse is damaged and you stand by and watch him destroy people,

relationships, and himself. But somewhere, deep down, you remember that he's just a kid--despite all he's been through--and you hold out hope that there's a shred of redeemability left in that very dark, very twisted soul. Five stars for this one. Beautifully done.

I thoroughly enjoyed this book. It isn't for every teen, but I think a lot of teens would like it. It was a quick attention grabber and entertained me the whole time.

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